

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 3165

EO 11652: GDS

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SUBJ: GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS ON MEDIA

SUMMARY: THE GOP MAY 28 ANNOUNCED RESTRICTIONS ON THE BROADCAST BY RADIO AND TV STATIONS OF UNAUTHORIZED NEWS CONCERNING THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS, THE NATION'S ECONOMY AND STUDENT AFFAIRS. THE RESTRICTIONS REFLECT THE GOP'S CONCERN OVER A DRIFT TOWARD CLASHES BETWEEN RIVAL STUDENT GROUPS, INCREASING ULTRA-NATIONALIST OPPOSITION TO THE GOP'S HANDLING OF CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE ECONOMY. OWNER OF TELEVISION NETWORK HAS EXPRESSED VIEW THAT ON BALANCE THE IMPACT OF RESTRICTIONS WILL BE POSITIVE. END SUMMARY

1. RICARDO RODRIGUEZ MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT AND JUSTICE CALLED TOGETHER MAY 28 OWNERS AND MANAGERS OF PANAMA'S RADIO AND TELEVISION STATIONS AND READ TO THEM A LIST OF FOUR PROHIBITIONS AND SANCTIONS APPLICABLE TO BROADCASTING STATIONS. HE DECLINED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS OR GIVE ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AFTER HAVING READ THE STATEMENT. EMBASSY'S FREE TRANSLATION OF A COPY OF THE PROHIBITIONS FOLLOWS.

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2. BEGIN QUOTE (1) THE TRANSMISSION OF AND/OR

COMMENTARY ON NEWS, WHICH IS NOT OFFICIAL, RELATED TO THE PROBLEM OF THE PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS IS PROHIBITED.

((2)) THE TRANSMISSION OF AND/OR COMMENTARY ON NEWS PERTAINING TO ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE COUNTRY, WITHOUT PREVIOUS CONSULTATION WITH THE RESPONSIBLE MINISTERS, OR (WITH) FUNCTIONARIES WHO CAN GIVE OFFICIAL COMMENTARY CONCERNING IT (THE NEWS) IS PROHIBITED. (3) THE TRANSMISSION OF AND/OR COMMENTARY ON NEWS RELATING TO STUDENT AFFAIRS IS PROHIBITED. (4) MAKING COMMENTARY ON OR DIVULGING THE ABOVE MENTIONED RESTRICTIONS IS PROHIBITED. (THIS SENTENCE WAS IN CAPS FOR EMPHASIS.) SANCTIONS: TRANSGRESSION, VOLUNTARY OR INVOLUNTARY, AGAINST THE ABOVE-LISTED MEASURES, WILL BRING AS A CONSEQUENCE THE IMMEDIATE REVOCATION OF THE CONCESSION FOR THE USE OF RADIO AND TELEVISION FREQUENCIES. END QUOTE

3. RADIO IMPACTO, RADIO MIA AND RADIO EXITOSA HAS BEEN PERSISTENT CRITICS OF THE GOP ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES INCLUDING THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. RADIO IMPACTO, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ULTRA-NATIONALISTIC AND FIERY ALBERTO QUIROS GUARDIA, HOWEVER, HAD GONE FAR BEYOND THE OTHERS IN THE INTENSITY AND PERSISTANCE OF ITS OPPOSITION TO THE GOP. QUIROS HAS BEEN RELENTLESS IN HIS PURSUIT AND EXPLOITATION OF EVIDENCE THAT THE GOP WAS SLIDING AWAY FROM ESTABLISHED NATIONALIST POSITIONS IN THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. MORE RECENTLY, RADIO IMPACTO HAD COME TO THE DEFENSE OF THE OPPOSITION STUDENT GROUPS, PARTICULARLY THE REVOLUTIONARY STUDENT FRONT (FER) WHICH HAS BEEN PUBLICLY DEMONSTRATING AGAINST GOP POLICIES AND COMPETING WITH THE MORE MODERATE AND GOP-GUIDED LEADERSHIP OF THE FEDERATION OF PANAMANIAN STUDENTS (FEP). DURING AND AFTER THE ATTACK BY FEP-AFFILIATED SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ON RADIO IMPACTO MAY 23, QUIROS BROUGHT IN A FER GROUP AND BROADCAST THEIR ACCUSATIONS AND VERBAL ATTACKS AGAINST THE FEP AND THE GOP. OBSERVERS WERE PREDICTING THAT IF THE TREND TOWARD CONFRONTATION WERE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE CLASHES BETWEEN RIVAL GROUPS OF STUDENTS WOULD BE INEVITABLE.

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4. FERNANDO ELETA, OWNER OF RPC TELEVISION (CHANNEL 4) TOLD EMBOFFS THAT DESPITE THE BAD IMAGE PANAMA MIGHT GET INTERNATIONALLY AS A RESULT OF THE APPLICATION OF THE RESTRICTIONS, THE LATTER WERE 60 PER CENT POSITIVE AND 40 PERCENT NEGATIVE IN THEIR IMPACT. THE MEASURES WERE A SIGN, ACCORDING TO ELETA, THAT THE GOP WAS ATTEMPTING TO CALM THE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AND CLAMP DOWN ON ULTRA-NATIONALISTIC AND

LEFTISTS.

5. JORGE ILLUECA, FOREIGN MINISTRY FOREIGN POLICY ADVISER HAS INFORMED EMBOFF THAT MARIO VELASQUEZ, TV CHANNEL 2 NEWS COMMENTATOR WENT DIRECTLY TO LT. COL. NORIEGA FOLLOWING THE MEETING WITH RODRIGUEZ TO INQUIRE ABOUT THE RESTRICTIONS. NORIEGA, AFTER BEING INFORMED OF RODRIGUEZ'S STATEMENT, TOLD VALASQUEZ THAT RODRIGUEZ HAD GONE BEYOND HIS INSTRUCTIONS AND VELASQUEZ COULD IGNORE THE RESTRICTIONS. ILLUECA ALSO SAID CHIEF NEGOTIATOR TACK AND MEMBERS OF ADVISORY GROUP BELIEVED THAT IMPOSITION OF RESTRICTIONS WAS AN ERROR -- DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY AND THAT IT SHOULD BE RESCINDED.

6. COMMENT: IN CONTRAST TO PRESS, PANAMA'S RADIO AND TV, ALTHOUGH SUBJECT TO PRESSURES IN THE PAST, HAVE HAD LESS DIRECT CONTROL EXERCISED OVER THEM THAN HAVE THE NEWSPAPERS. THE IMPOSITION OF RESTRICTIONS IS EVIDENCE THAT THE GOP HAS BECOME WORRIED OVER THE COMBINATION OF ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, GROWING STUDENT UNREST, AND OPPOSITION TO TORRIJOS POLICY IN THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. WHETHER MINISTER RODRIGUEZ WENT BEYOND HIS INSTRUCTIONS AS VELASQUEZ REPORTED REMAINS TO BE DETERMINED.
JORDEN

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